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THE MUSICAL TIMES,

And Singing Class Circular.

JANUARY 1st, 1849.

ON MUSICAL DECREES.

To the Editor of the "Musical Times."

SIR,—You will doubtless have noticed with pleasure the increasing number of young musicians, who, in the present day, are entitled to attach to their names the distinctions, *Mus. Bac.* (Bachelor in Music), or *Mus. Doc.* (Doctor in Music).

The principal condition for obtaining the first of these honourable distinctions, is to submit for the approbation of the Professor in Music at the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge, the composition of a piece of music for voices in five parts, with an accompaniment for the organ; and, for the Doctor's degree, the composition of a piece of music for voices in eight parts, with accompaniment for an orchestra.

The general public, and those unable to form an opinion of a young professor's merit, may thus have a guarantee of the musical progress made by those who have successfully passed either ordeal; and the benefits to the musical art of some such test, previously to any professor being engaged as a teacher of music, are so evident, that the public may feel surprised that the instances are yet so few of musical professors who take advantage of this official evidence of merit, although well able, from their education, to fulfil the before-stated conditions; but I think I shall be able to point to other conditions, at present required on taking musical degrees, which act as obstructions to the spread of what might otherwise be an excellent measure of musical merit.

The cost of taking either degree is more than fifty pounds; the Doctor's degree considerably exceeding that sum: and large as the sums are, their amount appears still more objectionable when we learn how they are appropriated. The University Professor, who examines the candidate's composition, and pronounces on its merit, receives but three guineas, and all the rest is required for fees, and other matters, which do not forward the interests of the musical art. Part of the expense arises from the condition, which requires the candidate's composition to be publicly performed in Oxford or Cambridge by resident musicians, generally necessitating the hire of some public room, and otherwise entailing expense, which in no way contributes to settle the real question at issue, viz.: the candidate's qualification as a composer.

At the time that a candidate is put to this unnecessary trouble and expense, the entire proceedings fail to prove one material point—a point which should be placed beyond dispute, viz.: proof that the composition is really the production of the candidate for honors.

At the Royal Academy of Painting in London, candidates for admission are required to send a drawing, and if it be approved, they are invited to attend at the Institution, and *there* make another drawing from the cast, in further evidence of their talent.

A similar test might easily be arranged for musical degrees, so that the University Professor should call on the candidate to compose, in his presence, certain parts to a theme to be then furnished. If such a procedure had been hitherto insisted upon, the accusation which has been openly made against a *Mus. Bac.* of the present day—that he obtained his degree by a composition which had been written for him—would have been impossible; and the possibility of this having occurred, whether the accusation in the particular instance alluded to, be true or false, should make an alteration in the present mode of examination imperative.

The extra trouble to the University Professor might be repaid by doubling his present fee; and such increase would be no burthen to the candidate, if the remaining expenses were abated.

But it seems to me, that if the cost of these degrees were brought within any reasonable sum, so many professors would avail themselves of honors, which would be attainable only by really skilled musicians, that a moderate fee would not only well repay the University Professor, but that the surplus might go towards the foundation of musical scholarships, to be bestowed on promising musical students. The public would also have a ready means of avoiding those proverbially blind leaders, who at present are so hard to detect, and of whom the patronage is detrimental to the art in so many ways.

It was my intention to have given some account of the objectionable power possessed by some authorities in England to confer musical degrees, without requiring any test; and also of a pleasanter theme, in a short notice of the foundation of the Oxford Professorship of Music, which is attributed to our enlightened King Alfred the Great; and of some other matters connected with this interesting subject; but I find that my communication has run to so unreasonable a length, that I will reserve what I had to say until I see whether you will find room for what I have already sent; and in the mean time I beg to subscribe myself

Your well wisher,

AN ENGLISH MUSICIAN.